

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A13

NEW YORK TIMES  
23 February 1986

# Rome Prosecutor Says Bulgarian Lied on Alibi

By JOHN TAGLIABUE

Special to The New York Times

ROME, Feb. 22 — A Government prosecutor accused a Bulgarian airline official today of having lied when he told Italian investigators that he was not present when Pope John Paul II was shot.

The prosecutor, summing up the case against the official, Sergei I. Antonov, also said Bulgaria had destroyed documents central to testing Mr. Antonov's account.

If found guilty, Mr. Antonov faces life imprisonment, and such a verdict would reinforce the case that Bulgaria's intelligence service plotted the

shooting of the Pope on orders from the Soviet Union. That has been the contention of Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk who was convicted of wounding the Pope and who later turned state's witness.

The nearly nine-month-old trial continues to irritate East-West relations. The Soviet Union has accused Western secret services of fabricating the charges to generate "an anti-Bulgarian, anti-socialist campaign" and deflect attention from "the United States policy of state-backed terrorism."

A statement by the Association of Soviet Lawyers, issued Tuesday by the official press agency Tass, said the trial "served as a pretext for numerous

actions in Italy and other Western countries and for violations of norms of international law and of the national legislation of these countries."

The reference was apparently to recent United States antiterrorist actions in the Mediterranean, such as the forcing down in October of an Egyptian airliner carrying the hijackers of the cruise ship Achille Lauro.

Mr. Antonov, the former Rome station chief of the Bulgarian state airline, Balkanair, is charged with taking part in the assassination attempt in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981. He initially named his wife and several fellow employees as witnesses who could

confirm that he was not in St. Peter's the day of the shooting, as Mr. Agca charged.

The prosecutor, Antonio Marini, said he later withdrew his wife as his witness, saying she had left Rome for Bulgaria five days before the shooting.

The prosecutor suggested Mr. Antonov had changed his story because Mr. Agca had testified that he met Mr. Antonov, his wife and other Bulgarians in the Antonov apartment for a planning session shortly before the shooting. The new information enabled the Italian defense attorneys to argue that Mr. Agca had lied, since Mrs. Antonov was not in Rome at the time of the purported planning session.

But the prosecutor used the detail to assail Mr. Antonov's credibility and reinforce his contention that Mr. Ag-

ca's account, despite many contradictions, is basically reliable.

"How could he be mistaken about the presence of his own wife?" Mr. Marini asked.

He said Italian customs officials were unable to confirm when Mrs. Antonov left Italy, and the Bulgarian Government, asked to supply her passport, said it had been destroyed.

Mr. Marini's campaign of picking at minor details seemed to underscore the paucity of evidence available to the prosecution, aside from the sometimes erratic testimony of Mr. Agca.

Earlier today, Mr. Marini pressed his argument that Mr. Antonov, despite his denials, knew English, which Mr. Agca says he spoke with him to plan the shooting. But the only testimony on that came from a former Balkanair

flight attendant, now in the West.

She said that she had never met Mr. Antonov but that knowledge of English was required to become a Balkanair station chief. Mr. Antonov said he knew little English, relying on phrase lists and subordinates's help.

The prosecutor opened his summation against Mr. Antonov and two Bulgarians being tried in absentia — Todor S. Aivasov, a former embassy official in Rome, and Lieut. Col. Zhelyo K. Vasiliev, the former deputy military attaché here — after calling this week for life imprisonment for three Turkish defendants. They include Musa Serdar Celebi, the former head of a Turkish emigrants' organization known as the Gray Wolves, which the prosecution says was paid by Bulgaria to carry out the assassination attempt.